



Washington
State Department of
Agriculture

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Gypsy moth treatments begin in Kitsap and Pierce counties

OLYMPIA – The [Washington State Department of Agriculture](#) (WSDA) will conduct the first of three treatments to eradicate European gypsy moths next week. In total, WSDA will treat about 1,300 acres with Btk (*Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki*), which is approved for use on organic food crops and has been safely used in previous gypsy moth eradication projects for decades.

The first treatment at Kitsap Naval Base Bangor and in the Graham/Puyallup area is anticipated mid-week, depending on the weather. A low-flying airplane will apply the Btk using GPS to ensure on-target application. Each subsequent treatment will be approximately 3 – 14 days after the initial aerial spray. All treatments are weather dependent and the schedule is subject to change. WSDA expects to complete all applications by the end of May.

Due to the effect weather can have on treatment times, WSDA is advising people in or near the treatment areas to visit agr.wa.gov/gypsymoth and sign up for e-mail, text or robo call alerts issued the day before any application takes place. Changes in scheduled treatments will also be shared via these notification systems. WSDA will use its Twitter account, @WSDAgov, to provide real-time information during operations as well.

Postcards have been mailed to residents in and near the treatment areas advising them of the coming work and directing them to notification options. The public can also [enter an address](#) in a map on the agency website to verify whether their residence is within the treatment area.

Btk is not considered harmful to humans, pets, birds, fish or bees. Btk is found naturally in the environment and has an excellent safety record. Although the risk is low, the Washington State Department of Health says that people who wish to minimize their exposure can remain indoors during spraying and for 30 minutes afterwards as a precaution. The product washes off with soap and water.

Btk is sticky when applied, to better adhere to foliage. Residents in the treatment areas may choose to cover cars parked outside and bring in toys, etc. Btk washes off outdoor articles with soap and water.

Gypsy moths pose a serious threat to Washington's environment, with the caterpillars feeding on over 500 types of trees, plants and shrubs. The pest is permanently established in 20 states across the Northeast and Midwest, where it has defoliated millions of acres of forest and urban trees. In 2017, gypsy moth caterpillars defoliated one-third of the entire state of Massachusetts.

If gypsy moth were to become established in Washington, it would threaten forest ecosystems, lead to quarantine restrictions on forest products and horticulture, and result in long-term increases in pesticide use by homeowners.

Washington has regular introductions of gypsy moths each year, most frequently by people moving to the state from infested areas. WSDA's last gypsy moth treatment was in 2016, when the agency treated over 10,000 acres for gypsy moth caterpillars, including Seattle and Tacoma. To date, no gypsy moths have been detected in the treatment areas since the 2016 eradication project.

WSDA has been trapping for gypsy moths for over 40 years and has successfully prevented them from establishing in Washington by safely eradicating reproducing populations. Visit the agency's gypsy moth web page at agr.wa.gov/GypsyMoth to learn more or call the WSDA toll-free hotline at 1-800-443-6684.

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Note for media: WSDA public affairs will have staff in the field for first application to assist the media. On the day of operations, Karla Salp can be reached on her cell phone, 360-480-5397.